

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 1557

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM, EC
SUBJECT: RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS
IN ECUADOR: COMMENTS OF PRESIDENT POVEDA

1. ON MARCH 8 THE CHARGE HAD OPPORTUNITY TO RAISE
WITH SUPREME COUNCIL PRESIDENT POVEDA THE SUBJECT OF
HUMAN RIGHTS. THE CHARGE NOTED THAT DURING HIQICON-
SULTATIONS IN WASHINGTON THE PREVIOUS WEEK HIGH USG
OFFICIALS HAD EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT THE GOE'S DIS-
QUALIFICATION OF ASSAD BUCARAM FOR THE PRESIDENCY.
HE TOLD PRESIDENT POVEDA HE BELIEVED THE CURRENT
EXCELLENT STATE OF BILATERAL RELATIONS DERIVED IN LARGE
PART FROM THE ADMINISTRATION'S STRONG SUPPORT FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT AND FROM THE EXCELLENT
EFFORTS AND RELATIVELY GOOD RECORD OF ECUADOR IN
THESE AREAS. HE SAID THE BELIEVED THAT THE DISQUALIFICATION
OF BUCARAM HAD HURT THE GOE IN WASHINGTON, BUT REPEATED
THAT ALTHOUGH THE USG SUPPORTS FREE AND FULL
PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS, ITS POLICY IS TO MAKE NO
PUBLIC STATEMENTS OR TAKE ANY ACTIONS THAT MIGHT BE
CONSTRUED AS INTERVENTION IN THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF
A FRIENDLY SOVEREIGN STATE.

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2. PRESIDENT POVEDA STRESSED THAT THE DISQUALIFICATION
OF BUCARAM HAD OCCURRED PRECISELY BECAUSE THE MILITARY
GOVERNMENT WAS COMMITTED TO RETURNING ECUADOR TO CIVILIAN,
DEMOCRATIC, CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, AND TO DOING IT
IN SUCH A WAY THAT CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT WOULD BE
ASSURED FOR YEARS TO COME. HE SAID THE ARMED FORCES HAD

PREVENTED BUCARAM'S ASCENSION TO POWER IN 1972 AND AGAIN IN 1978 BECAUSE BUCARAM WAS A DEMAGOGUE WITHOUT PROGRAM AND WITHOUT THE PERSONAL CAPACITY TO GOVERN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX AND SOPHISTICATED SOCIETY. HE SAID TO HAVE LET BUCARAM RUN WOULD HAVE ENDANGERED THE RETURN PROCESS ITSELF, BECAUSE OF THE VERY STRONG OPPOSITION TO HIM WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES (IMPLYING THAT HIS DIS-QUALIFICATION SHOULD HEAD OFF ANY MILITARY COUP ATTEMPTS); AND HE SAID THAT IF BUCARAM WERE TO HAVE RUN AND WON HE WOULD LIKELY HAVE BEEN DEPOSED WITHIN A FEW MONTHS BECAUSE OF HIS INEPTNESS.

3. POVEDA SAID THAT OTHER MILITARY GOVERNMENTS IN THE HEMISPHERE ARE TALKING ABOUT RETURN TO CIVILIAN AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENTS, BUT THAT ECUADOR WAS THE ONLY COUNTRY WHERE CAREFUL ATTENTION WAS BEING GIVEN TO REORGANIZING THE BASIC POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURE SO AS TO AVOID A LAPSE INTO THE CORRUPT AND UNSTABLE SYSTEM OF THE PAST. HE EXPRESSED APPROVAL OF THE WAY THE POLITICAL SCENE WAS BEGINNING TO TAKE SHAPE.

4. THE CHARGE THEN RAISED DIRECTLY THE QUESTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. HE NOTED THAT SEVERAL MINOR POLITICAL FIGURES HAD BEEN DETAINED BY THE POLICE FOR PERIODS OF SEVERAL DAYS DURING THE LAST COUPLE
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MONTHS, AND SUGGESTED THAT THESE KINDS OF ACTIONS COULD FURTHER HURT THE GOE IN WASHINGTON. THE CHARGE STATED THERE ADDITIONALLY WAS CONCERN ABOUT THE MANNER IN WHICH THE GOE WAS TREATING ITS LABOR SECTOR. HE MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY A REPORT THE EMBASSY HAD RECEIVED THAT THE GOE WAS CONSIDERING WITHDRAWING OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF OR BANNING CEOSL (THE AIFLD SUPPORTED UNION IN ECUADOR).

5. PRESIDENT POVEDA ASSERTED STRONGLY THAT THERE WERE NO POLITICAL PRISONERS IN ECUADOR AND THAT THE MINOR POLITICAL FIGURES THE CHARGE HAD REFERRED TO WERE ARRESTED FOR BREAKING SPECIFIC LAWS. HE SAID THESE LAWS HAD BEEN ENACTED TO ASSURE A TRANQUIL AND ORDERLY RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL AND DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT. HE SAID HE WOULD ASK MEMBERS OF HIS GOVERNMENT TO EXPLAIN TO THE CHARGE THE LAWS UNDER WHICH THE MINOR POLITICAL FIGURES WERE DETAINED, AND HE EMPHASIZED THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT'S ADHERENCE TO LAW, ITS RESPECT FOR INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND THE ABSENCE OF ANY BRUTALITY OR TORTURE IN ECUADOR.

6. WITH RESPECT TO GOE CONSIDERATION OF WITHDRAWING OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF OR BANNING CEOSL, POVEDA SAID KNEW NOTHING OF IT. HE ASSURED THE CHARGE THAT THE GOE HAD NO SUCH PLANS, ADDING THAT HE HAD ENOUGH PROBLEMS ALREADY WITH IRRESPONSIBLE CIVILIAN POLITICIANS WITHOUT STIRRING UP AND PROVOKING THE IRE OF A WORKING CLASS ORGANIZATION.

7. COMMENT. ADMIRAL POVEDA'S REMARKS ON THE MILITARY'S DISQUALIFICATION OF BUCARAM ARE CONSISTENT WITH WHAT OTHER GOE OFFICIALS HAVE TOLD US. HIS ARGUMENT THAT THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT WISHES TO RESTRUCTURE THE POLITICAL SYSTEM SO AS TO ESTABLISH A LASTING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IS THE THEME HE HAS BEEN PROPOUNDING EVER SINCE
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HE WAS MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT UNDER PRESIDENT RODRIGUEZ-LARA.

8. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT POVEDA VIGOROUSLY RATIONALIZED HIS GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS WITH RESPECT THE DISQUALIFICATION OF BUCARAM AND THE ARREST OF MINOR POLITICAL FUGURES, THE CONVERSATION SERVED TO REMIND HIM THAT ALL VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, NOT JUST TORTURE AND BRUTALITY, ARE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT BY THE USG AND CAN AFFECT A NATION'S RELATIONS WITH US.

9. FINALLY, THE EMBASSY HAD LEARNED FROM A RELIABLE SOURCE TWO DAYS PRIOR TO THE MEETING WITH POVEDA THAT THE MINISTER OF LABOR WAS THINKING ABOUT WITHDRAWING RECOGNITION OF THE CEOSL FACTION HEADED BY JOSE CHAVEZ. POVEDA PROBABLY WAS UNAWARE OF THIS. POVEDA'S REACTION TO THE CONTINGENCY OF THIS MEETING MAY HELP TO FORESTALL ANY SUCH PLANS BY THE MINISTER OF LABOR.
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